Thomas the Rhymer

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By

W. Macneile Dixon

OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY, GLASGOW

Written at the request of the Pageant Committee for the Scottish Historical Exhibition of 1911

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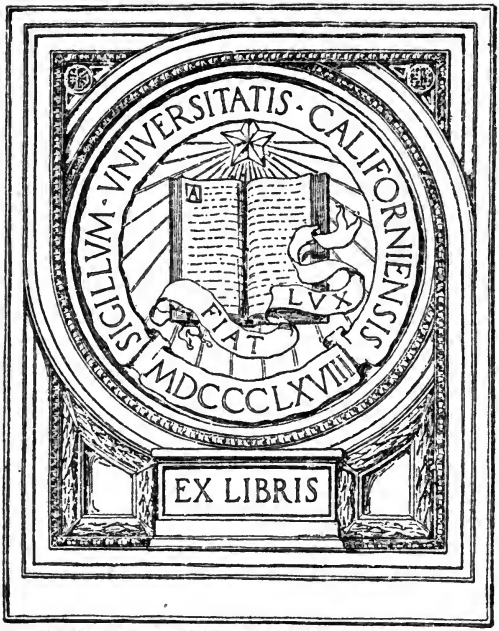

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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TO

MY MOTHER

WHO KNOWS WHAT POETRY IS

AND YET

IS OF MINE AN ADMIRER

RATHER THAN A CRITIC

274049

"All suddenly I saw the Faery Queen
At whose approach the soul of Petrarch wept."

SIR W. RALEIGH.

"In this year three Scots came from Ireland to King Alfred in a boat without oars, whence they had stolen away because they wished, for the love of God, to be on a pilgrimage, they recked not whither."

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 891.

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PREFACE.

Dressed in the flowing robes of fable Thomas of Ercildoune, or Thomas the Rhymer, is an imposing figure in the literary and legendary history of Scotland. Treated in the fashion which has placed History among the sciences and imperilled her place among the Muses, he dwindles in stature. The most sceptical of modern critics have not, I gather, ventured to doubt his actual appearance on the stage of time, nor been able altogether to deprive him of the honours and dignity he wore without question for five or six centuries. But they have shorn his hyacinthine locks, he is no longer the superb figure

> "for whom
> Morn well might break and April bloom."

It can hardly be doubted that the Thomas most famous of renown was a native of Tweedside, of the village now unhappily called Earlstoun, and that he flourished during the thirteenth century. His reputation as a seer, also indisputable, resting upon certain predictions of the chief events in the Edwardian wars of the fourteenth century, appears to have been firmly rooted in his lifetime, or in the years immediately succeeding his

death, and certainly extended far beyond the limits of his own district. Thomas appears also to have been illustrious as a poet, and is credited by a contemporary, Thomas Mannyng of Brunne, with the authorship of "an incomparable romance of the story of Tristrem," but the *Thomas* of that poem, it is sometimes perversely argued, is another than *Thomas of Ercildoune*. Yet a poet, great or small, our Thomas must surely have been, for many poems were ascribed to him by early tradition, among others—although here again we are warned against credulity—that which celebrates his meeting with the Faery Queen, his journey with her through "middel-erthe," and seven years' sojourn in her kingdom. Of this poem a great part consists in a prophetic survey of the English and Scottish wars of 1300 to 1400, a singularly lifeless performance, which we may perhaps believe is by another and later hand than the faery tale, that here shines like "the rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear."

The popular ballad, modernised by Scott, and believed by him to be an oral version of the old romance, is, too, under grave suspicion as a mere modern imitation in the ballad manner of the poem ascribed to Thomas, nor can it be traced beyond the eighteenth century. I have not strictly followed the story as given in the original romance of *Thomas of Ercildoune*,[1] and I have ventured

[1] Preserved in four MSS., and edited for the Early English Text Society by Dr. W. Aldis Wright of Cambridge.

altogether to alter its tone and character. Many of its features were unsuitable for the present purpose, others hardly agreeable to modern taste. Faeryland, as conceived by the author of the romance, was not wholly a pleasant place, and in some measure was apparently at that time confused in the popular fancy with regions more feverishly imagined. I have also, with perhaps unpardonable audacity, assigned to Thomas a modern taste in his appreciation of the romances so contemptuously described by Ben Jonson—

> "the whole sum
> Of errant knighthood, with the dames and dwarfs,
> The charmèd boats and the enchanted wharfs,
> The Tristrams, Lancelots, Turpins and the Peers,
> All the mad Rolands and sweet Olivers."

There is no authority in *Thomas of Ercildoune* for the literary aspirations here ascribed to him, for the account given of the origin of the faery race, for the Queen's knowledge of classical myth, and her rivalry with Apollo, nor for the conversion of Thomas to her cause. But since Shakespere's time and before it the boundaries of Eastern and Western romance have been, in poetry at least, extremely uncertain, and one may perhaps with sufficient accuracy describe these provinces of dreamland as contiguous kingdoms, inhabited by races not unrelated nor wholly unacquainted with each other.

PROLOGUE.

THUS the old tales have reached us, wandering down,
The tales belov'd in many an ancient town;
Told to the children, who their children told,
Long, long before our printed books were sold;
Told to the ring of eager faces, glad
If the good tale were merry, sad if sad:
Told in the cottage by the winter blaze,
Told at the harvest in the autumn days,
Told in the meadow neath the summer sun,
Told in the sowing-time when work was done.
When the thick woods cloth'd every mountain side
And the dark waters in the valleys wide;
When in the thicket and the shaggy glen
The wolf had home, and the fierce boar his den:
In the old days when children oft had sight
Of fairies dancing in the clear moonlight,
And danced themselves by day upon the green
Where elves and fairies had been often seen:
Before men built the great high-road and street
Now trodden by so many hurrying feet,
And the poor fairies fled away to find
Haunts more secure and places less unkind.

SCENE I.

(The curtain rises and discovers Thomas the Rhymer seated under Eildon Tree. Below him lie Melrose and the river of Tweed, to the North the vale of Leader and Cowdenknowes. He is composing and recites the verses he has made.)

Thomas of Ercildoune hymns Apollo.

Thomas. These are the slopes of Apollo, the slopes of the laurell'd hill
Where the god immortal imparted to mortals his sacred skill.
For, from his Delian island, the lord of the silver lyre
To Delphi pass'd, and Parnassus, to kindle the ancient fire.
Many a city call'd him, and there where the song was made
And like to his own the music, the wheels of his chariot stay'd,
Till wide to the west he wander'd, and under his axle tree,
Cradled in mist and girdl'd by streams of the Northern sea,

Fairer the mountains sprang, and sweeter the meadows spread
Than Delphi knew, or Delos, or the dews of Hellas fed.
And from his car the Pythian stepp'd, and the laurel wood
Shook, and the forest rustl'd where his sun-bright horses stood.
So in the rose-red morning of the early world he came,
And struck his lyre in the morning air, and gave to the land his fame.

He is surprised by the Faery Queen and mistaketh her for a goddess.

(Enter the Faery Queen with her train of attendants. She is dressed royally in silk, her skirt of green, her bodice set with pearls and precious stones. Around her neck is a chain of diamonds: she carries a golden bugle in her hand.)

F. Queen. What rhymes are these, Thomas of Ercildoune?

Thomas. Most sure of Heaven the Lady Mother thou!

F. Queen. Nay, nay, beneath the stars I hold my reign.

Thomas. Then art thou Artemis, or Hebe call'd,
Or golden Aphrodite wonderful.

She revealeth herself,

F. Queen. Some charm obscures thine eyes, thou art mista'en:
No goddess am I, but the Faery Queen.

Thomas. The Queen of Faeryland!

F. Queen. The moon-mad Elves,
The Fays and Pixies are my subjects all,
The Brownies and the Gnomes in earthy cells,
And the night-wandering goblin knave who frights
The evening milkmaid and the farmer's lad—
Light, thoughtless sprites, crazy with liberty,
Oft am I weary of their trickeries.

Thomas. Is there then noyance in the Faeries' Land?
Not bliss unbroken as in Arcady
Where tuneful shepherds meet to pipe and sing?

F. Queen. The seasons alter, and the showery Spring
Not mars, but makes the happy harvest days.

Thomas. I know it, lady.

F. Queen. I intend not stay
But greeting only; where I poets find
I bid them hail, for welcome is their art.
I am the Queen of dreamers and of dreams,
And many poets do me fealty.
What rhymes are these that, under Eildon tree,
Thou ponderest, some posy for a maid?

and asketh the theme of his verses, naming herself the inspirer of poets.

Thomas. Came never the God of Song to Scotland, lady?

F. Queen. Once did he come. When came he, gentle Io?
For thou wert deep enamoured of his strains.

Thomas in turn enquireth from her of Apollo,

Io. Long since he came, and found chill welcome here.

and becometh aware of the rivalry between the Civic God and the Queen of Romance.

F. Queen. How? a chill welcome, child? 'Tis true, he smil'd
A cool approval on our revelry,
But better lov'd, he said, the serene air
Of civil regions; pillar'd shrines he lov'd,
Fair cities, bright with marble terraces
And fountains carv'd, and gardens, and tall maids,
Shapely, swift-footed boys, and goodly speech
Upon the lips of many-minded men;
Not the wild moorland and untutored vales,
The forest haunted by ill shapes of fear,
Or tangled thickets, drowsy with the hum
Of life that seeks the dark. I knew he car'd not
For this my empery. Him hast thou prais'd?

Thomas. Him, in the verses thou hast heard, I prais'd
—A god imagined—but thou standest here
Not royal less, Queen of my world and me.

F. Queen. Not of thy world: betwixt thy world and mine
A mist inclement hangs; illusions dire,
And doubt, and madness and misshapen dreams
Throng in that fever'd air for mortal men.

He desireth to transfer his allegiance to the Faery Queen and to follow her,

Thomas. Yet, lady, I would join thy company.

F. Queen. How? Follow in my train? It cannot be!

Thomas. Must, then, the fabric of my sudden heaven
So soon dissolve to dust and memory?

but is told he asketh the impossible.

Have my eyes wak'd to beauty but to close?

F. Queen. You know not what you seek.

Thomas. May I not be Yet still urgeth his suit.
Subject and lover of thy loveliness?
Hear and be merciful. The gentlest, thou,
Of all things gentle that mine eyes have known.
By all things gentle I would thee entreat—
The snowdrop and the April daffodil,
Summer's wing'd flower the painted butterfly,
The carol of the quivering lark, the chirp
Of hedgerow crickets, and the pastoral song
Of the long grasses by the quiet pool—
Be gentle, lady, to my prayer and me! *(He kneels.)*

F. Queen. Wilt thou adventure among hidden things He is warned of the fate of former adventurers into the unknown,
To seek new paths and the vale perilous,
Heedless of how of old the heroes fared?
For some in the past seasons of the world
Came where the lotus bloom'd, nor car'd to seek,
Under its sleepy spell, their homeward way.
And some, with Iris, found the poppied haunt
Of Somnus, near the dark Cimmerian land,
Where sound of human voice is never heard,
Nor the dog barks, nor the cock crows, nor branch
Sways in the air Lethean, thick with cloud.
And for the Elysian meadows, far, far down
Below the extreme margin of the sea,
Others grew grey in search, and some who knew
Circe and Circe's charm never return'd;
And some the Siren voices drew to death;

And some in hollows of deep island vales,
Far from the clamour of the echoing wave,
Forgot their friends and kindred, and forgot
The farms and cluster'd cottages of home.

and answereth that uneasiness of heart is ever the portion of him to whom a lovelier world than his own hath been revealed.

Thomas (Rising). Lady, familiar are my native hills,
And all the fields familiar, endear'd
By memories and unforgotten loves;
More beautiful by custom made than vales
Of asphodel beneath a cloudless noon;
And where the river runs, the miller's wheel
By mine own dwelling hath a melody
Fuller of whispers than the forest has;
Yet here no longer can I find my home,
No longer can I watch the setting sun
Or the low climbing moon above the trees
With heart at rest. Into the woods the bird
Flutters from his safe cage,—the woods are strange
And fearful every beat of his free wing,
Yet never to his prison comes the bird,
Or comes to pine and grieve;—that bird am I.
No pale return of customary things
Nor comfortable pleasures pleasure him
Whose soul has travell'd, for the traveller
Must lift the veil, though lifting it he die.

F. Queen. How profits knowledge if thou come by death?

Thomas. Slaves profit in unprofitable things.

F. Queen. What urges then to this unflattering quest?

Thomas. The seed that Heaven hath planted in men's souls.

F. Queen. Hope, is it? And of what is then thy hope?

Thomas. I am aware of some magnificence
Beyond me, in a world I know not yet.

F. Queen. Strange hardihood is thine! I blame it not.

Thomas. Without its hardihood what world were this?

F. Queen. I marvel at the race of men, their toils.

Thomas. The vesper bell speaks of mortality.

F. Queen. Yet some men sit at ease, nor travel far.

Thomas. The man may live, although the soul be dead.

F. Queen. Thomas of Ercildoune, perplext and blind
The journey, and the path thou seekest now
Not easy is it for a man to win.
Through middle-earth thy travel is, no light
Of sun or star, nor friendly whisper heard.
And if thy spirit fail thee, never again
Shalt thou behold the light of sun or star.
Darkness, and silence blinder than the dark,
There miserably rule, and the thick air
Distempers and disfeatures the swift mind.

The perils of the journey through middle-earth are made known to him.

Thomas. With thee for guide I have security.

F. Queen. Nay, listen, on this journey none may speak,

Not I to thee nor thou to me at all,
Tormented though thou be, and sick with doubt;
Nor when thou farest through the oblivious flood
That ebbs not, flows not, nor with wind is stirr'd,
The intolerable flood. But listless, vast, sullen, intolerable,
League beyond league spreads its unrippled stream.
Not Lethe, nor Cocytus, nor the pool
Of Acheron, where sad Persephone
Holds in the shades her melancholy court,
So seems the gulf of all unhappiness.

Thomas. I have not found silence more difficult
Than speech.

F. Queen. This past, still there remains to pass
A milder region, exquisite to sight;
The perilous meadows. Green meadows, so enamell'd with soft flowers,
So musical with birds and rustling brooks
That they Hesperidean gardens seem.
There late a comer from the inclement dark,
As the sea-weary sailor from the sea
Blissfully wandering in country lanes
Watches at pasture the slow feeding kine—
The mellow orchards, peace encircled, thou,
With parched lips and three days fast oppress'd,
Shalt deem the utmost land of all desire,
And the fair-seeming fruit angelical
Pluck to assuage thy anguish'd thirst; the fruit
Ambrosial is, yet, if thou taste, undone
Is all thy travel, all thy toil in vain.

Forth thy bewildered soul to vacancy
Is swept, dishonour'd; lost in the abyss
And undetermin'd prison of the void.

Thomas. My mind is fixt; nay, if this land of thine — Thomas's resolution notwithstanding holds,
Lay beyond all endeavour, and I came
Never to haven, yet my ship should sail.

F. Queen. So resolute a mind oft the event — and his request is granted,
Compels, and by some alchemy transmutes
Foul to fair fortune: granted is thy prayer.

Thomas. O Queen of queens!

F. Queen. Yet, save in dreams trafficking, seldom came — though but rarely it seemeth hath Faeryland been visited.
Mortal to Faeryland, less visited,
As legends tell, though better worth, than realms
Inhospitable; the bleak coast beheld
By Orpheus, or by him more fortunate,
Alcides, who the fair Alcestis sought,
Or Priam's son, when he, in company
With the reluctant souls by Charon oar'd,
Was ferried to the inexorable world
By Minos and by Rhadamanthus rul'd.

Thomas. Most sovereign lady, till my days have end
None shall have place with thee, my mistress thou,
My Queen and arbiter of destiny.

F. Queen. Faeries, come hither! Ere the foot be set — Preparations for the journey are made.
Of this adventurous stranger on his way,
Hasten, ye must prepare him, and exact
Guidance and warning give, which side to lean

In doubt and hazard, and through the pitchy lake
His course how steer. Myself, more skill'd, the charm
Of unimpeachable virtue can impart
That with Egyptian subtlety involved
In meshes of this chain, protects the wearer,
(Placing it around the neck of Thomas.)
If to the links he fit the spoken spell.

Faeries. We serve you, Madam.

F. Queen. Where is my herald?

Herald. Here at your bidding, Madam.

F. Queen. Hie thee then,
And this command be at my palace given,
In three days' time proclaim we festival
Shorn of no circumstance of majesty,
Of honour, ceremony or delight
That to the hospitable art belongs.

Herald. I obey you, Madam.

Thomas biddeth farewell to his native soil and country,

Thomas. Sweet childhood memories, I leave you now!
Not without tears. O farms and villages!
O woods and pleasant rivers, fare ye well!
Believe not that I love ye less, nor chide
Me, fugitive, by some false dawn beguil'd,
Or amorous fancy, nor ungrateful call.
Dearer to me the broom, the heather wild,
The folded slopes, the cottages, the lanes,
And meadows where the swallow flits at eve,
Than Babylonian gardens, opulent groves,
Or Eastern cities, marvellous as dreams,

Ancient as Time, that from the desert lift
Their palms and palaces under the moon.
O wonderful dark hills, and storied towers!
Your beacons, tossing flame and battle, fade!
And if I come not, if into the night
A horseman never to return I ride,
As sons of yours have ridden, and my name
Come never on the lips of men for praise
Or word to make it honourable, yet
If well with you, with me 'tis also well.

(The Faery Queen withdraws, leading with her Thomas.)

Faeries (Singing). and the Faeries sing a welcome to Faeryland.

Come with us, mortal, come!
Through the moonlit shades of the forest glades,
Where the Faeries meet in their dim retreat,
Come with us, mortal, come!
There the shy dreams creep from the darkness deep
To flutter with noiseless wing,
And the bright-eyed stars 'mid the branching bars
Of the oak and the elm-tree swing.
Where the merry Fays through the wildwood ways
Dance by the firefly's light,
Thou shalt read the runes of the silver tunes
That ring through the dewy night.
By thee the fawn on the dappled lawn
Shall fare to her wonted nook,
And the naiad slip from the reedy lip

Of her cave in the crystal brook.
For the viewless wind shall round thee bind
A spell of the silken twine,
And thy mortal lot shall be all forgot,
And the home that once was thine.
Come with us, mortal, come!

(Exeunt.)

CURTAIN FALLS.

SCENE II.

(Enter before the curtain the Faery Herald.)

F. Herald. Your hand in mine I take,
I wave my sleepy wand—
You rub your eyes and wake,
And lo! 'tis Faeryland!

(Curtain rises upon Faeryland and the arbour of the Faery Queen. She is seated there in the midst of her attendants. A golden harp is by her side, to the accompaniment of which she recites. At her feet Thomas of Ercildoune reclines, listening.)

The Faery Queen is about to relate the tale of Tristram and Iseult,

F. Queen. Of Tristram is the tale I tell you now—
Tristram and Iseult, Iseult of Ireland—
A history more moving than the tale
Of deathless Troy, or Hero's, for whose love

Leander of Abydos swam the swift
Hellespont, or sad Dido's, the sea-queen
By the god-driven Trojan left to die—
(Enter Cara.) but is interrupted by the entrance of Cara
Ah! Mischief! whither tripping hast thou been?

Cara. Among the mortals wandering, and found
In a delightful dell under the pines,
Beside the sandhills and the twinkling sea,
Children asleep, grown weary of their play;
There I have sung to them to fill their dreams.

F. Queen. That music we would hear. What hast thou sung?

Cara. This ditty, Madam— who singeth a ditty.

(Sings.) Would you live in the wood
On the Faeries' food,
On honey and cowslip wine?
With a nut or a berry
To make you merry
When the Gnomes and the Pixies dine?

Would you sleep in the dark,
Like a thrush or a lark,
With the wise stars over your head,
And the spiders at night
To tuck you up tight
In a gossamer-curtained bed?

Would you argue with bees
In the hollows of trees,

Or hurrying ants on the ground?
Or gossip with crickets
In chirruping thickets,
With beetles about and around?

Then, children, I'll take you
To where we will make you
As happy as squirrels in May.
Each shall choose for himself
Whether he'll be an Elf,
Or a Brownie, or Gnome, or a Fay.

Thomas. How happy sleep and dreams when thou art near!

CURTAIN FALLS.

SCENE III.

(Enter the Faery Band, followed by the Faery Queen and Thomas, dejected. The scene is again under Eildon tree.)

Faeries (Sing). Here, as we trip advancing,
Time with us trips, and we
Measure our steps to his dancing,
Master of mirth and glee.

Thomas, about to part from the Faery Queen, is disconsolate, and blames Time.

Thomas. Time is no friend of man, rather of Fate,
Of Chance and Change, and harsh Necessity
The kinsman, and of Death the messenger.

F. Queen. Yet is he sole bringer of joy, a spirit
Impartial, and takes but what he brings;
And master is he of all melody;
Nor can the shepherd pipe, the poet sing
Without him, nor the laughing village girls
Order their nimble footing on the green.

Thomas. There is no tyranny like Time's; the fierce
Barbaric Emperors and Kings of Ind,
Dreadful, omnipotent, insatiable,
Were mild to this grim conqueror, who drives
His pauseless and irrevocable wheels
Down the interminable slope o' the world.
Time spares not, Time is unforgiving, Time
Unyielding, unpostponing, merciless.

F. Queen. Time brought thee hither.

Thomas. Aye, and drives me hence!

F. Queen. Thou hast for seven years, the utmost term,
In Faeryland thy foreign dwelling made.

He is rebuked, and told of his seven years of happiness,

Thomas. Ah, lady, at the gate of misery
Why jest with me? Seven years! Thou knowest I came
A few hours since, not yet a sennight gone!

F. Queen. Ask of the villager whom first thou meet'st
What years have sped since Thomas of Ercildoune
Went, none knew whither; or the child at play
Scan, as he gazes at thee, a stranger grown.
Children are boys and girls, maidens are wives,

Old men are dead since under Eildon tree
We met to journey to our Faeryland.

but cannot credit the swift passage of Time during his sojourn.

Thomas. 'Tis impossible!
F. Queen. Hast thou not known it?
Thomas. Nor can believe it now, although thou sayest.
F. Queen. So unimaginable is the flight,
The swallow flight of joy—under its wings
A day a moment seems, a month an hour,
A year a day, a lifetime but a year.

Memories of Faeryland recalled by Thomas,

Thomas. And now I go. No more are they for me
The divine wanderings; no more for me
The blissful wildernesses, and dim shrines
Amid the leafy forest depths withdrawn:
The solitary streams and cavern'd hills
From whose abrupt and dizzy ridges toss'd
To the liquid amethystine air, as gods,
Down looking from Olympian parapets,
We gazed on windy islands, ring'd with foam
And purple waters of unmeasured sea.
F. Queen. Bitter is the relinquishment of sweet.
Thomas. No more for me the music in the glens
Bubbling from secret flutes in hollows hid,
Where the shy Elf among cool water reeds
Sheltered, more sweet made the sweet air of morn:
The rustling brakes, whence mischievous revellers
With bright eyes, parted lips and streaming hair,
Burst with a sudden laughter, and the pools

Where like white water lilies Naiads float.
Come hither, all ye Fays and Elves! entreat
Your Queen for me.

who entreateth the Fays and Elves to intercede for him.

Faeries and Elves. We pray you grant him stay.

F. Queen. There is no remedy. If thou remain'st
Thou art lost indeed; since here in Faeryland
For all our happiness is tribute paid.
Long since with Saturn, thou hast heard me tell,
When he by Jove, the usurper, westward driven
From high Olympus fleeing came, there came
With him though fallen, of the immortal race
Faithful a few; from these, outcast, are sprung
My subjects, less in stature, less in power
Than the unexil'd progeny of gods.
So by the angry victor maim'd, who yet
Unreconcil'd, each seventh year requires
Harsh tribute, and to the realm of Pluto sends
One, luckless, of the dwellers here to pine,
Suffering, an aeon in his iron towers.
Thee, finding here, a mortal, and beyond
The confines of thy proper state, his wrath
Will doom incontinent. I bid thee go,
I, sorrowful and sharer in thy pain.

The need of his departure explained.

Thomas. Lady, thy will is mine, and I, erstwhile
To a mysterious felicity drawn,
Must I all hope relinquish, and become
For evermore a dweller with the past,
Dreaming of yesterday?

He enquireth if his going will be without return,

and is bidden to hope,

F. Queen. I bid thee hope;
For thou again shalt see the arched glades,
And see the cloudy cataracts, and hear
The murmur of the pines, and climb the peaks
Of Faeryland; and watch the Dryads peep
From lattic'd arbours, wondering, or dart
Down the long alleys, with the Fauns at play.
And thou shalt see him, Pan, the shepherd Pan,
Far-travell'd Pan, from Hellas wandering,
In hearing of a stream, watching the stars;
Or, by the rushes where the iris flowers,
Piping at noonday to Silenus old.
For here they come, Dryad, and Nymph, and Faun,
Pan and Sylvanus, though to me they owe
No fealty, and with my Fays and Elves
Join in the revel of the budding Spring.

Thomas. Most merciful lady, never did I hear
So musical speech.

But required for a season to return to his home.

F. Queen. Yet to thy home again
Tranquil returning, thou must there abide
Not months, but many years, and so fulfil
Thy mortal lot, nor plan escape, nor seek
To find me here, or elsewhere, night or day.
Faeries and elves! attend upon me now.

He seeketh some token that his experience is more than a dream,

Thomas. Lady, a token! For now the westering sun
Wheels to his setting, and I part from thee
And regions fairer than by poets feign'd—
Lest these fantastical I deem, the obscure

Mintage of fond imagination,
Or curious imagery of madness wrought
By the bewildering commerce of the wild.

F. Queen. What answer shall we give this doubter, say!

Io. Who hears in Spring the angel of the Spring
The nightingale, when jealous Autumn spoils
The stationary woods, has he not heard?

Thomas. Not visionary I would count my bliss.

F. Queen. Yet thou wert happy, and is happiness — is chided for his doubts,
Aught else of lesser worth, or then impair'd
If ecstasy? Or is its being chang'd
When to thyself thou seem'st thy proper self?

Thomas. Too soon it fades, as the unparallel'd — yet remaining unsatisfied,
Slow pageant of the unimpassion'd stars,
Incredible, yet patent, with the dawn
A wither'd loveliness, fades into day.

Io. The day too yields to the returning stars.

Thomas. Fled is his vision when the dreamer wakes,
Nor can he will his dreams a second time;
Untaught, unsummon'd, unannounc'd they come.

F. Queen. How causeless is thy insecurity!

Thomas. Oft without cause are men disquieted:
I have no sword mortal to Doubt, nor shield
Against Misgiving.

F. Queen. Who comes to Faeryland — is told that he is already possessed of prophetic vision.
Is wise before the event, and sees from far
Into the clouded and oncoming years.

Thou hast it now, the vision unconfin'd
Of sage and prophet, divining, who foretold
War, or disastrous battle, or revolt;
Or oracles read, and augur'd well of change
Or ruin; as he, the Israelitish seer,
Who in captivity the finger saw
Come forth, and write the monarchy's eclipse,
When, with a thousand of his lords, the King
Belshazzar feasted in his palace dismay'd.
Art thou content?

He desireth rather skill in poetry,

Thomas. Ah, lady, not that boon
I crave, but skill in poesy, to dwell
Within the shade of the ambrosial tree
Of Beauty, from whose legendary boughs
Nor leaf nor blossom falls. Thou rememb'rest
In that serene and unexampl'd bower
For the immortal Muses fram'd, in song
And starry chronicle by thee enthrall'd

and recalleth the tales told him by the Queen,

I sat, forgetful of the flying hours,
And heard the tread of armies mustering
To battle, or to siege of cities fam'd:
And march'd with captains and with kings, or fled
With fugitive queens; or deep in dungeons lay
By wizardry enchain'd; or greeting gave
To merchants trading with their caravans
Westward to Ispahan or to Shiraz
From Samarcand; or on high terraces
By busy havens, watch'd the speeding sails—

Galleys of Tyre or Alexandria
On Euxine, or the Mediterranean sea.

F. Queen. Thou art eager still, nor is thy palate cloy'd.

Thomas. Nor these alone, but tales more wonderful
Of shadowy wild wastes and haunted lands,
Or mountain spirits of the lonely mere;
Of charms, and talismans, and weapons forg'd
By goblin craft or sorcery forbid, — of magic and mystery,
In fiery smithies subterranean—
Cunningly link'd armour of proof, and blades
Temper'd miraculously, and by brood
Of giants wielded, or by Saracen
Or Christian, when around Jerusalem
On banner'd fields the Cross and Crescent burn'd.

F. Queen. This faery lore I teach, but teach to few.

Thomas. And thou hast told me, too, of Odin's hall
At Asgard, city of the Northern gods,
Where in Valhalla valiant heroes slain — of the Northern Valhalla,
Mightily feast, deep drinking from the horns
Of foaming mead by the Valkyries crown'd—
The fierce Valkyries, choosers of the slain.
Best I have loved, and best remember now
The tales of Charlemagne's and Arthur's wars, — of the Knights of Charlemagne and Arthur.
And the isle Avalon, and Astolat,
Carlion, and Camelot, and Joyous Gard,
And of that ship-wreck'd land of Lyonesse,
A summer land of the blue noon, and fruit,

And bird, and blossom, where no summer comes
Now, nor the winds visit where it lies
Gloom-hidden in the gulf of plunging seas.

Being questioned, he professeth wholly to have transferred his allegiance from Apollo to the Queen of Romance,

F. Queen. Is there a magic in Apollo's strains
To match with mine?

Thomas. Thy songs are sweeter far,
For when thou speakest a young angel stands
Wide-wing'd upon bright waters, beckoning;
And in my ears, sea-haunted, the wind calls
Beyond the dim horizons of the world.

F. Queen. Yet thou hast prais'd Apollo.

Thomas. Yea, lady, I
Have prais'd him, dost thou marvel at my praise?

who admitteth the skill of Apollo, but acknowledgeth it not as superior to her own.

F. Queen. I marvel not. The springs of Castaly
Beneath the ridges of Parnassus hill,
Than wine more wondrous and more cordial,
Are potent for the singer and the song.
Yet not alone in Castaly who dips
For the glad water in his hollow hand,
Nor from the fountain Hippocrene who drinks,
Learns the fair secret of soft-woven words.
I know a stream where the tall hills divide,
Where the pale primrose on the curvèd bank
Peeps at the sun—its waters sovran are,
Friendly to poets; at this rural shrine
Come to the pilgrim faery visions.

Thomas recalleth and praiseth the romances of chivalry.

Thomas. Knew I the place I there would drink and tell
Of battles and strange ventures long ago;

And of how Oliver and Roland came
To Roncesvalles; stories of chivalry
And courtesy faultless as the rose aflower;
Or of the ladies Iseult, or Elaine,
Or the wise Merlin, who unwisely taught
Things dark and hid to the fair loveless maid,
And sleeps, and heeds not love, nor call of love,
Lost in the long woods of Broceliande.
What histories are like to these, what strains?
The pageant of the Grail, and peerless Knights,
Fame on their helms, and in their faces fame,
Pelleas, and Percival and Galahad,
And Lancelot and Tristram, lords of war.

F. Queen. All these shall be the themes of poets, I
Their mistress and the mistress of their lore.

Thomas. Happy were I had I the power to sing
Passionate quests for maids unfortunate,
Tourneys, and crash of arms, and bugles blown
In the clear dawn, under towers marvellous,
Enchanted, 'mid tall trees and golden fern.

F. Queen. Thomas of Ercildoune, thou choosest well. The Faery Queen setteth forth the excellence of the poetic art,
For since with Marsyas Apollo strove
Sacred the lyre, sacred the art, which steals
The unimaginable sweet divine
Of heavenly harmonies, shaping the clay
Of terrene things to patterns of Paradise,
Universal, unfading. For as one
Who, gazing on a painted window, sees ts nature

Not the earth's hate, and lust and travailing,
But, in pure joy of brightness, sun-lit queens
And kings in jewelled armour all ablaze,
And dreams his dream; or as the dust and rage
Of angry battle and of spurring knights,
In some old castle's storied tapestry,
Fade to the pale charm of the silken thread,
And woven dyes, and fair embroideries,
So in the poet's picture wounds and pain,
Tears and the bitter sorrows of the world,
Heart-sickness, misery, and the pitiful cry
Of love despairing and uncomforted
Die smilingly, and sovran beauty sways
The soul at ease 'mid unsubstantial cares.

and transforming power.

Thomas. Lives there who with this skill is not content?

F. Queen. Take then this token, and my poet be;
And as the child with the swift, fearless foot
Of childhood steps into the lovelier world,
And through the gates, and o'er the threshold goes,
Nor dreams he goes into the house of dreams,
Nor is, nor feels a stranger, happy there
In his own natural home and heir of all,
So thou. And now farewell until I send
My messengers; for when the hart and hind
The greenwood and their distant haunts secure
Leave, and by village paths and peopled lanes
Hard by thy dwelling come, that day may'st thou

Thomas is accepted by the Faery Queen as her chosen poet,

Hither repair, and seek me once again.
Till then with minstrelsy contentment find.

Thomas. Farewell, O Queen! Queen of Romance! Farewell! and biddeth her farewell till she send for him.

(The Faery Queen and her attendants withdraw slowly.)

Faeries (Sing). When the traveller returns
And the voyage is o'er,
How the heart in him burns,
How sweet is the shore
With the hills of his youth, and the fields, and the flowers that his footsteps restore.

But the spell of the past
And the spell of the main
That were over him cast,
Will they speak not again
In the sound of the trees and the waters, in the noise of the wind and the rain?

In the ears of the child
From his taking of breath
Is the voice of the wild
And the word that it saith,
Though the prize be a longing unslaked, and the price of it danger and death. *(Exeunt.)*

(Thomas is left gazing after the Faery band until it disappears from his sight.)

CURTAIN FALLS.

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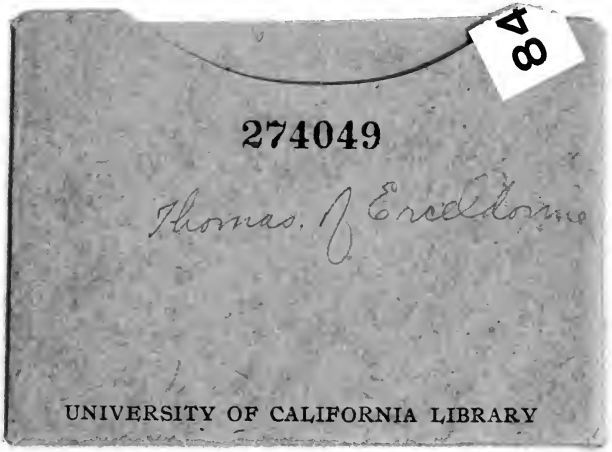
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